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Group to fight MIA missions

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WASHINGTON — Bungled private rescue missions aimed at finding American soldiers missing in Southeast Asia have become too frequent, contend some veterans. They're forming a new organization to discourage such derring-do.

The "Center for POW-MIA Accountability" will include several veterans of covert action in Vietnam and government officials who have connections with the federal intelligence community.

Their goal: to stop secret soldier-of-fortune forays into Laos and Cambodia to locate the handful of American servicemen still believed to be prisoners there. Too many were unsuccessful.

"This group will try to keep the cowboys out," said James C. Pollock, author of *Mission M.I.A.*, a best-seller on the missing-in-action in Vietnam.

Pollock told USA Today, there are usually three or four such private fact-finding attempts a year. The CIA two years ago fruitlessly paid Thai mercenaries to find a Laotian jungle prison camp where MIAs were allegedly held.

The Special Operations Association and *Soldier of Fortune* magazine are involved in funding of the new group.

Pollock admitted he used some profits from his book to finance one mission himself. It was headed by a Congressional Medal of Honor winner who spent three months among Hmong tribesmen in Laos last year. It too came to naught.

The new group, said Pollock, "will have more clout than existing organizations. For instance, if the CIA or Defense Intelligence Agency has something going, they don't want a band of clowns screwing it up."

The government says 2,494 American servicemen are missing in action. Until recently, it classified all as presumed dead.

In recent months it's backed off that presumption and has catalogued 465 eyewitness sighting claims from Southeast Asian refugees, who say they've spotted as many as 40 American prisoners at a time still being held.